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OUR RECREATION FACILITIES AND THE IMMIGRANT

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When one spends a summer Sunday in a European small town or village one often sees a large part of the population at some kind of a fête. In eastern Europe, especially in Russia and Slavic Austria, we see the workingmen and the peasants on their holidays dancing and singing; in Germany, Bohemia and Switzerland we have turner societies giving their performances, at which the whole town assists. Each province has at certain seasons special festas, at the time when the grapes are picked, or the hops are harvested, or when the grain is brought in. The harvesting fête is one of the old pagan offerings of thanks to the gods, full of simplicity and gracefulness. Not only Germans have this fête, but also Poles, Russians, Bohemians and Italians, each in a different way.

Down in Italy, the male population, if not in a café, may be seen playing everywhere on Sundays the game of boccia. This game does not need much space; a small wooden ball is thrown, and each of the players tries to get his ball as near to it as possible. We all know what a rôle music and dancing play in the recreation of the Italians, Spaniards, Slavs and Germans.

In large cities recreation on Sundays has to be taken in a different way, and has undergone quite a change, with the help of greater transportation facilities. The latter enable the people to get out into the woods for a nickel, or less, and every Sunday morning we see whole legions storm the trains or street cars, carrying with them the necessary family provisions, which are supplemented at the picnic grounds by coffee and beer procured at low cost. In Germany libraries, bathhouses, swimming beaches, the military manoeuvre fields and armories, the gymnasiums which are attached to every school, parks and waterways provide ample space and opportunity for the recreation of the people free of cost, and in other progressive countries we find the same provision.

What happens when these people come over to the United States? We all know that different nationalities, by preference,

settle in special quarters of the city among their own kind. It is not because the part of the town is especially desirable and attractive; quite the opposite. The well-to-do move out into the suburbs, whence trains, street cars or automobiles bring them into their work and offices. The quarters deserted by them, and invaded by factories or business houses, become the homes of thousands of foreigners. It is very often the oldest part of the town, very solidly built over, though the buildings are not high. There is no provision for fresh air in the houses, the rooms are dark, streets narrow. The only open places are generally in front of churches and old cemeteries. In the East we know many such quarters, where especially the Italians, Negroes, the Jews and Poles dwell. Have they any place for recreation? Their children, yes; for imaginative children will make use of any place and any thing for play, even in the overcrowded cities. The street is, and remains, their only playground in connection with the houses and alleys in the neighborhood. Grown-up people have very little time for outdoor play and exercise. The struggle to live is so intense, the day's work requiring the whole amount of their energy and vital force, and quite a number of the foreigners are not able, or not willing, to provide the necessary food for the continuous restitution of force to the exhausted body. In the habit of keeping to a certain form of diet, they are often unable to accustom themselves to American food. Can they take recreation on Sundays and holidays as they used to at home? It depends on the kind of recreation each nationality wants.

If one goes on Saturday morning to Hester Square in New York one will be reminded of certain parts of Cracow or Warsaw on a similar day. Venerable old Jews congregate there for the discussion of the Talmud, or the conditions in the old country; the younger generations' topics are politics, races or business. There is always some business going on, though Shabbes is the day of rest. Hester Square has the advantage of being in a thoroughly Jewish section of the town, so that peace is seldom disturbed by other races.

Likewise, city squares in lower California will remind the traveler of scenes seen in southern Europe or Mexico, where a large percentage of the male population turns out on the piazza in the afternoon. This recreation strikes most people here as loafing.

It is not objectionable to the American, while certain forms of celebrating the Sabbath are considered by him obnoxious.

We do not believe that it is an advantage for any national group to form a settlement all by itself. Though it offers the only place to the newly arrived foreigner where he feels safe to a certain degree and free from restrictions, it, at the same time, retards his adjustment and conversion to the ideas and ideals of his adopted home. His absolute freedom seems to be restricted here in two very different ways, by the police and by his own children. The policeman was always regarded by the foreigner the representative of the law and government, not always dreaded, but often considered a friend and guardian angel, speaking their language and usually living in their part of the town. How different all this is here! The policeman is usually Irish or German, very few being of any other nationality; they all speak English, and are not willing, or not able, to learn another tongue. To some extent corrupt, they know that it is pretty hard to get anything from the foreigners for letting them do as they want to. They are bullied, ordered around, and arrested in no time. Recently, after a murder on the North Side in Chicago, over 190 Italians were arrested without formality in saloons where they took their time-honored form of recreation. The day was very cold; work they had not—where could they have gone but to “the poor man’s club”?

The children are taught in the public schools to a large degree that everything American is all right, and that most of the things that their parents brought from Europe are no good. It may not be said in this crude way, but in substance it is the same. The grown-up people sometimes forget their surroundings, and feel inclined to do things they did at home, dance, sing and play; and then the children often try to discourage the frolics of their parents, either because they think them ridiculous themselves, or for fear of the comment of the neighbors’ children. The result is that singing and playing are done behind closed doors. The people shut themselves up in their homes when they feel particularly happy, or sad, thinking, perhaps, of their little hut in the mountains or on the plains, or their stone house by the sea.

A reaction against this could be brought about by spreading public feeling of appreciation of the great moral and ethical value, and of the inherent beauty, of the ancient national and regional

plays and pastimes. An encouraging beginning has been made in American cities through the play festivals, where a large number of spectators enjoy the dances and folk songs of an ethnically mixed crowd of children and grown-ups. For many years the citizens of the different countries have celebrated their national holidays—the French, their 14th of July; the Norwegians, their day of independence from Sweden, the 17th of May; the Swedes, the old Germanic midsummer festival; the Germans had their turnerfest and sängerfest; the Bohemians, their sokol, or turnings. The difference between the two kinds of celebrations, the play festival and the other, is that the latter are celebrated by one nationality exclusively. The performers and spectators belong to the same group, the rest of the community not being excluded and not desired, while the play festival interests large differentiated groups; in fact, the whole population. By the very fact that the co-operation of their parents and kin is sought, that they appear in public, that afterward they see their pictures in the English papers and read a glowing account of the event, their whole attitude is changed. When they can say, "My mother danced the Tarantella," or "Father, the Czardas," or "Our Norwegian Choral Society was encored twice," much is gained for the child, the parents, and for the country.

The future lies in the children; give them as large an inheritance as you can, do not rob them of their associations with the old country and its amassed riches. Recreation in any form provided by public agencies in the United States does not tend to counteract the good influence and teachings of home and church, as many seem to think; on the contrary, it emphasizes them. A certain amount of discipline is necessarily maintained at the playgrounds; selfishness cannot be indulged in, for every one must have a chance. Bad habits, such as uncleanness of mind and body, will disappear, for fear of public exposure and scorn. The directors and social workers at the parks and playgrounds and recreation centers constantly try to improve the tone and the standard of their patrons, young and old.

From May to October is the busiest season of the playgrounds in Chicago. Then the open-air facilities are taxed to their utmost, the gymnasiums, athletic fields and tennis courts, wading-ponds and swimming-pools. The playgrounds proper, with sandpiles and wad-

ing-ponds, are for the use of children under 10 years of age, and are equipped with some apparatus for the enjoyment and play of the users. The wading-pond is one feature that attracts grown-up women to the parks. While their little ones enjoy the cool, refreshing water, or play in the sand, with absolute freedom from danger, the mothers sit on the benches, protected from the sun, sewing or doing other needlework and chatting with each other. Quite naturally, groups of one nationality form quickly, but as this sense is undeveloped in children, and as they mix with each other, their mothers will, sooner or later, do likewise. Children are mostly benefited, as the fatiguing day's work generally prevents the grown-up people from enjoying much physical exercise, except, perhaps, the swimming. The swimming-pools and beaches are the most popular features, and not only the men but the foreign women enjoy them twice a week. It does not cost anything, everything being free except transportation to the place. After the refreshing plunge in the pool they can often enjoy a concert given in the park or playground, the fresh air of a hot summer night being far better than the stifling heat in their homes. In some enlightened cities people are allowed to sleep out on the grass when the heat is especially oppressive, and thousands take advantage of it.

During the colder season the shower baths which are connected with the gymnasiums are constantly used, much more so than the different public bathhouses one finds in some sections of the city. The reason for this may lie in the fact that the management of the institutions is under different departments. At the playgrounds you generally find attendants willing to serve the public, under strict supervision as to their manner, while the bathhouses are often managed by incompetent friends of some politician in the city hall. The indoor and open-air gymnasiums are only for children over 10 years of age and adults. The apparatus, different in gymnasiums for men and women, helps a large crowd to play and practice as they please, but likewise, gives the gymnasium instructor opportunity to work out his scientific and more formal plan of physical work. Here, as well as in athletics, foreigners will form groups of their own, which are brought in contact with other groups at the time of contests. Then keen excitement reigns supreme; the friends of both competing teams are present and shout for their favorites. Defeat is

accepted, but always with the hope of doing better next time. In winter, skating and tobogganning are enjoyed by young and old.

In every human being is a sense of beauty, though it may sometimes be dormant. None of the new recreation centers and playgrounds can fail to satisfy the artistic vein in anybody and make him content and happy for the time being. To counteract a desire to go to saloons for drinks and meals, we find very decent lunch counters and a few inviting tables in an especially fitted room, where simple meals and coffee and cocoa are served. Some of these places are stormed at noon, when school teachers, clerks and workingmen take their luncheons there. Public comfort stations connected with each playground and field house are, indeed, a great comfort, as well as an educational means for cleanliness. They also keep men from going into the saloons.

If any time is left at the noonday recess many people will take advantage of the public branch libraries established and maintained by the park commissioners. More foreigners would probably make use of the opportunity to increase their knowledge, and to enjoy a restful half-hour at other times, if these libraries were stocked with some foreign books and magazines. But almost no provision is made for the different nationalities living around the parks, and the result is that, as a rule, only young people are seen in the reading rooms. At some playgrounds children are sent home from the library by 8 o'clock; adults are expected to take their places, and, in fact, have come in large numbers. Quite naturally, they objected to the presence of crowds of children. In other cities the plan of having separate rooms for adults and children has been adopted with good success. Smoking is not allowed inside of the field houses and small parks, which is probably another reason for the men's not coming in greater numbers. During the afternoon and evening hours the large rooms and halls of the parks and recreation centers serve other purposes. Children come after school hours for socials, story-telling hours; girls, for some kind of training in cooking and domestic science. Often they have rehearsals at this time for a singing contest, or a little children's play, to be given at 8 P.M. in the large auditorium. Not only children play, but clubs and societies of grown-ups can have the privilege of the hall for the asking. Then, too, they have theatricals, musicals and dancing. Music they furnish themselves, also

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refreshments, and in the hall they keep order, while outside there are always special park policemen on the lookout. Men will still rush out and go to a saloon for a drink or smoke, though the drinking has been stopped to some extent. The influence of the hall upon dance halls in the neighborhood, and upon the way of dancing and the whole atmosphere, has been especially felt at the small parks, while in Bohemian and Polish neighborhoods they have been so successful that several dance halls back of saloons have had to be closed because their business has declined. Girls especially like nice environments and decent conditions, such as are found in the field houses. What people do in one of the South Chicago parks, at Bessemer, may be best demonstrated by two clippings from the *Daily Calumet*, their local paper:

Business is good at Bessemer. Among other things that will take place at the park this week are as follows:

To-night—

7.30. Bessemer Orchestra practice.

Tuesday—

2.30. Bessemer Housekeepers' Club, consisting of seventy-five wives, who get valuable training.

8.00. Strugglers' dance. Social club.

Wednesday—

8.00. Club for working boys.

8.00. Stereopticon lecture: Other worlds than ours.

8.30. Basket Ball. Armour Square *vs.* Bessemer.

Thursday—

8.00. Meteor Athletic Dance.

Friday—

8.00. Rehearsal of gymnasium classes for gymnastic demonstration. Glee Club rehearsal, under direction of students of University of Chicago."

Two hundred young people enjoyed themselves for hours on the Bessemer Park skating pond yesterday afternoon. If the cold weather continues it is very likely that there will be a local ice tourney at the park.

The larger parks are used in summer time by family groups for outings and picnics. Especially fine zoölogical gardens, green- and palm-houses, lakes and ponds attract hundreds and thousands

every Sunday, and there is no age limit as to enjoyment. The ponds and lakes offer opportunity for boating and some fishing. Where large bodies of water lie not very far from the city, fishing continues to be one of the best-loved sports of the foreign population. If the results gratify the patience of the anglers, the diet in the kitchen experiences an agreeable change. Very few people, comparatively, keep up their cross-country tramps; it may be that the absence of forests, or woods, through which one may roam at one's pleasure, as in Europe, takes away a good deal of the fun. The abominations in the form of beer gardens or amusement parks can hardly be mentioned here. They are not fit places for recreation.

A very encouraging movement, when it shall have been more generally adopted, may provide for the healthy recreation of whole families. I refer to the city gardens. European communities are surrounded by large tracts of land ultimately to be built over, but for quite a time there is no prospect of the city's extending to them. Such lots are plotted out, flower and vegetable gardens started, and some kind of summerhouse added, having accommodations for pigeons and chickens. That the gardeners are a friendly community they show at the many happy fêtes on warm midsummer nights. The hard work done by every member of the family is rewarded by a variety of green vegetables, very helpful when everything is so expensive. At Bessemer Park, in South Chicago, last fall, we saw a splendid exhibit of the children's garden products, and the work of Mrs. Pelham's (of Hull House) friendly gardeners, belonging to ten different nationalities, was watched by every one with great interest.

The public library and its branch stations, and different museums and collections, cater to the more intelligent of the foreign element, and are very much used by them for their recreation. The same can be said of the social settlements which, though not maintained as a public institution by the municipality, serve the general public and keep their doors open for everybody, without distinction of race, color or religion. We will follow here especially what Hull House does for the recreation of its neighbors. The need and want of recreation for young and old is generally conceded; if they do not get it in one way they will get it in another, often under bad conditions in the city.

Each department has a worker or two as directors. The directors of different groups are not very anxious to do all the work themselves, but they give suggestions when the members are unable to produce good, workable ideas themselves. Every detail is worked out, and great is the satisfaction when public applause shows success of the "stunt" or performance. We find different dramatic associations for children, juniors and seniors, and their work has met a merited and general appreciation. The Italian, Lithuanian, Russian, Jewish and Greek neighbors use the large auditorium for theatricals of their own; even deaf mutes once gave a representation in their sign language. Good music is offered to a large crowd of neighbors every Sunday afternoon, and this is not an amateur performance; good singers and players come from uptown to bring joy and pleasure to the hearts of the poor, who cannot pay for concerts. The second Sunday in January a musical society from Evanston gave Händel's "Messiah," and though the hall accommodates 800, many people had to be turned away for lack of space. Musical instincts are well developed among the Italians and Bohemians. The Hull House Music School has about one hundred pupils, and the Boys' Club Band may number fifty members. Their open-air concerts during the summer were events for the whole neighborhood.

During the winter months Sunday evening lectures are provided, which are of general interest and which often lead to prolonged discussions afterward. Travel, development of industries, biological and sociological subjects are discussed. The audience generally fills the hall, and many are told "No more room." Special favorites are asked each year to lecture, and their coming is greeted with thundering applause. The Boys' Club offers its hospitality to about one thousand boys. The underlying idea was to get them out of the streets and alleys, poolrooms and bowling alleys, and get them to a place where they could have some recreation under decent surroundings and good influences. Pool tables and bowling alleys, manual training, gymnasium work, play and study rooms and a library are at the boys' disposal, and a staff of men and women work hard to get some influence with the boys. The most loved forms of recreation are parties and dances for the grown-ups. Special occasions, like St. Patrick's Day and the beginning of Lent, bring a party of Irish or masked Italians to the house.

Most of the other dances are attended by mixed groups, though one is generally predominant. Only the People's Friendly Club and the neighborhood parties are absolutely international.

The inspiring thing about many of these dances is that people think of them constantly; it is often, for them, the one event of the year. The craving of people for some kind of amusement was never brought home to me so forcibly as in the following instance: A Bohemian friend had lost a baby, and wanted it buried before a certain date, in order that she and her other children might attend a picnic to which she had been asked. She had buried many children, but it was the first picnic invitation in her dreary life. Picnics during the summer time bring recreation to a good number of people, and one of the most needed charities, if such you call it, is to give to large numbers of working-girls the opportunity to relax for one or two weeks in the country, doing absolutely nothing.

The use of public schools after school hours for social purposes, municipal theaters and auditoriums for plays and dances, better library facilities, better and more beautiful housing of art galleries and other collections, increased bathing facilities, cheap and quick means of transportation to bring people out of the congested districts into the country have been established or are planned in all sections of the country. The progress made in the playground movement in the last nine years is astonishing, and it may be well to close this short survey of the recreation of the foreigner with the words of a Chicago student of the recreation centers. Mr. Eckhart says: "In these playgrounds lies the real beginning of the social redemption of the people in large cities. The greatest need of American life to-day is some common meeting-ground for the people, where business may be forgotten, friendships formed and co-operation established. The playground seems to have great possibilities in that direction. It is already the social center for the children, and it is becoming more so, more and more for adults. If we can systematically encourage this tendency and organize our playgrounds accordingly, we shall do much to satisfy a great need. A field house, in itself, is a good beginning in the way of bringing playgrounds to adults.

"The play festival is another feature which brings in the parents, and more and more games for the older people are coming to be added in most places. In many sections this year entertain-

ments and fairs of one kind or another have been held on the playgrounds, and there is an increasing tendency for mothers especially to bring their small children and to visit with each other. A great deterrent to the use of playgrounds for adults is the name, which suggests that it is for children, and the other is the lack of recreation for older people and the general lack of benches for the parents. Finally, it seems to me the general public has as yet scarcely come to a true conception of the financial need of playground systems and the size of the checks that should be made out to sustain them."